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AUTHOR Shapiro, Joan Poliner; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Recent debates regarding the crisis in American education have led to two essentially contradictory positions: one calling for a movement away from a unified concept of education toward a concept which recognizes and incorporates diversity; and the other calling for increased accountability on all levels of education. The purpose of this paper is to discuss and analyze these two positions from the perspective of educational administration, and then to offer a solution which may be capable of resolving some of the paradoxes inherent in these two reforms. A multicultural curriculum should address issues of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual diversity, and bilingualism. Some feel this vision threatens the school's traditional function of transmitting the dominant culture; in any case it poses the question: can schools be reconceptualized to represent and value diversity while at the same time maintaining that historical role? This problem becomes almost unsolvable in light of the present strident demands for accountability through the use of national tests. Ensuring accountability through standardized tests is a central theme of "America 2000" and other recent reform efforts. Although understandable, efforts to promote accountability through tests raise certain major concerns: (1) that they cannot in fact produce genuine accountability nor ensure real improvement in student learning; and (2) that they will negatively affect already disadvantaged groups such as minorities, the disabled, and the poor and all others who do not fit the white, middle class norms which seem to have informed "America 2000." One solution to the dilemma posed by the two reform trends arises from a national investigation of Women's Studies Programs called "The Courage to Question," which resolves issues of diversity and accountability through a new form of feminist assessment that is: (1) able to question almost everything related to assessment; (2) student centered; (3) participatory; (4) contextual; (5) decentered; (6) connected to activism; (7) compatible with its beliefs; (8) connected to the power of its pedagogy; and (9) connected to its interdisciplinary scholarship and research methodologies. These feminist approaches to diversity and accountability may increase the compatibility of learning, teaching, and assessment and raise important issues of value that expand the options available to the assessment movement as a whole, they also broaden the discussion of assessment as it relates to public school accountability and diversity. (Contains 40 references.) (TEJ)

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Towards a Resolution of a Paradox between Diversity and Accountability for School Administrators: Application of the Principles of Feminist Assessment

By

Joan Poliner Shapiro
Trevor E. Sewell
Joseph P. DuCette

Temple University
College of Education

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Mailing Address: Joan Poliner Shapiro
Associate Dean
Temple University
Ritter Hall 237
Philadelphia, PA 19122

Phone: (215) 787-8263

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Joan Poliner Shapiro, Trevor Sewell and Joseph DuCette,

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Introduction

The ten year debate over the causes and solutions to the crisis in American education has led to two strongly advocated positions. On the one hand, there is the demand for a dramatically new way to conceptualize the curriculum of American schools by moving away from a unified, single concept of what Americans should know and believe, toward a pluralistic concept which recognizes and incorporates diversity. On the other hand, there is a strong call for increased accountability at all levels of education, largely monitored through standardized tests.

We are convinced that these two positions, at least in the way they are currently being discussed by their strongest proponents, are essentially contradictory. More importantly, we believe that the divisiveness inherent in attempting to resolve these two opposing positions has the potential to create serious difficulties for American schools- the central arena in which this debate is being fought.

Our purpose in this paper is to discuss and analyze these two positions from the perspective of educational administration,

and then to present one solution which we believe has the potential of resolving some of the paradoxes inherent in these two contradictory reforms.

We will organize our paper around three major themes. First, we will discuss the multicultural curriculum -- how it is defined; what its advocates want it to do; what issues it presents for American schools. Using the work of Banks (1991), Tetreault (1989), Sleeter and Grant (1988) and others, we will review the various models of the multicultural curriculum from the perspective of the school administrator. As Banks has noted, most of the attempts to integrate diversity into the school curriculum are at a fairly low level of sophistication and development. Some questions that can be raised include: How can a school administrator produce the necessary climate for change where diversity is not only recognized but valued? What successful models are available that can be implemented at the school level? What problems are likely to be encountered in this process?

We will then turn our attention to the general issue of accountability and the specific issue of national standardized tests as the vehicle to achieve this accountability. We will present the arguments which have been forwarded by the proponents of accountability (among whom would be listed President Bush and Secretary of Education Alexander) to justify the development of national standards. As we have argued elsewhere (Sewell, DuCette & Shapiro, 1991; DuCette, Shapiro & Sewell, 1992), national

standards inevitably lead to national tests, and national tests inevitably lead to a national curriculum. Questions of concern might be: What are the implications of this development for school administrators? What position should an administrator take when confronted with the call accountability?

The third section of our paper will focus on one possible resolution to the dilemma, faced by school administrators and other educators, of combining issues of diversity with accountability. This solution arises out of the experiences of the National Assessment Team in developing an assessment plan for a national investigation of women's studies and gender studies programs. This project, termed "The Courage to Question" (Musil, 1992), was supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education and sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and the National Women's Studies Association. It evaluated seven women's studies and gender studies programs over a three year period of time. We believe that valuable lessons in meeting the contradictory demands of diversity and accountability were learned during the implementation of this project.

Based on the findings from "The Courage to Question", we will present some guiding principles of feminist assessment. While these principles might need to be modified for wider application, the experiences derived from the evaluation of the women's studies and gender studies programs should be useful for school administrators who are faced with the dilemmas posed by

balancing the multicultural curriculum and accountability. At the very least, we believe that these principles establish a framework within which the issues can be discussed in the broader context of the national debate on educational reform.

The Multicultural Curriculum and American Schools

Towards a Definition of the Multicultural Curriculum

The call for a multicultural curriculum, one which attempts to reflect and incorporate the diverse elements of American society, presents both a unique challenge and a unique problem for American schools. While there are many definitions of the term "multicultural curriculum", we believe that the logic of multiculturalism requires a definition more inclusive than many currently in the literature. Banks (1991), for example, has developed an influential, four-phase model of multicultural curriculum development which discusses the movement from a Mainstream Centric Model to an Ethno-National Model. In his discussion, however, the term "cultural" is basically synonymous with "ethnicity". Tetreault (1989), on the other hand, has presented an equally valuable, five-phase model of curriculum development in women studies. While Tetreault focused on gender, Asante (1987) and Fordham (1988) chose to emphasize race. Asante turned to African culture in an attempt to forge a cultural identity and, in so doing, to help African-Americans develop pride in the cultural background of their race. Fordham, on the other hand, focused on cultural extremes noting the differences between those who have a strong awareness of their race and those

who do not. She categorized those in the latter category by the term, racelessness.

While we believe that it is an important step in multicultural awareness for Asante, Fordham, Tetreault and others to present models which tend to focus more heavily on a single dimension of diversity, we believe that in practice a true multicultural curriculum for American schools will inevitably lead to the broadest possible definition. It seems to us that the inclusion of any aspect of diversity in the curriculum (for example, racial issues) must lead to the inclusion of others. For this reason, we will define the multicultural curriculum as one which includes a range of racial, ethnic, gender and social class issues and even broaden the definition to include the areas of exceptionalities, sexual diversity and bilingualism. Using Banks' (1991) definition, a fully developed multicultural curriculum is one in which all historical and social events are viewed from the perspectives of as many diverse groups as possible. We will also borrow definitions of diversity, from such writers as Sleeter and Grant (1988), Giroux (1992) and Capper (1993), that emphasize the importance of a social constructionist approach to multiculturalism. This focus is on the importance of preparing educational administrators and teachers to not only exist in an environment which is increasingly pluralistic and diverse, but to actually thrive in light of these demographic changes.

The proponents of the multicultural curriculum have argued that despite vast changes in American society, the schools still portray the "ideal" American in a fashion which has not significantly changed in 50 years. This concept is well captured in the following quote by Cushner, McClelland and Safford (1992):

> "Real Americans are white and they are adult; they are middle-class (or trying very hard to be); they go to church (often Protestant, but sometimes Catholic as well, although that is a bit suspicious); they are married (or aim to be) and they live in single-family houses (which they own, or are trying to); they work hard and stand on "their own two feet"; they wash themselves a good deal, and generally try to "smell good"; they are patriotic and honor the flag; they are heterosexual; they are often charitable, only expecting a certain amount of gratitude and a serious effort to "shape up" from those who are the objects of their charity; they eat well; they see that their children behave themselves" (p. 216).

The central issue underlying the call for a multicultural curriculum is that no single description of the "real American" is possible, and that American schools should stop trying to create one. It should be emphasized that this is not proposed as a cosmetic change. By moving away from a monocultural perspective in the curriculum, the proponents of multiculturalism believe that the needs of students who differ from the white, male, middle-class norm -- students whom the schools are largely failing -- will be better met.

Some Concerns About the Multicultural Curriculum

If, under a multicultural curriculum, the goal of the schools has ceased being to produce the prototypic "American", what, then, should the experience be which the schools are providing? It can be argued that the answer to this question has

been the central focus of American education throughout its history. The critical difference is that in today's discussion of this issue, the possibility has been raised that there is no single answer to this question.

According to some of its critics (Bloom, 1987; D'Sousa, 1991), the multicultural curriculum, with its emphasis on difference, has produced a potential crisis for American schools. With the decline in the belief in the American melting pot, each of the groups which comprise the American people has begun to demand that their unique values, history and viewpoint should be respected, studied and incorporated into the curriculum. Without a doubt, there are many positive outcomes to this movement--ethnic pride, a sense of community within groups which share a common culture, and a richer sense of heritage. The negative side of this movement, however, is that consensus about what America is and, more critically, what it should become, may be unattainable. As one of our mainstays in the popular culture, Time Magazine, in its July, 1991 issue, asks:

> "Put bluntly: Do Americans still have faith in the vision of their country as a cradle of individual rights and liberties, or must they relinquish these freedoms to further the goals of the ethnic and social groups to which they belong? Is America's social contract--a vision of self determination that continues to reverberate around the world--fatally tainted by its origins in Western European thought? What kind of people do Americans now think they are, and what will they tell their children about that?"

Critics of the multicultural curriculum contend that if the idea of a multicultural curriculum is carried to its logical conclusion, the ultimate result may be a nation which has no

unifying vision of itself, and has no common set of assumptions on which it may develop such a vision.

One of the major historical functions of schools has been to assimilate diverse group into the mainstream culture. This has usually meant that the curriculum, the teaching techniques and the methods of testing and assessment were identical (or at least very similar) for all students. The question posed by the demand for a multicultural curriculum is whether schools can be reconceptualized to represent and value diversity while at the same time maintaining their historical role of transmitting the dominant culture. This problems would be acute under any circumstance. It becomes almost unsolvable in light of the recent reform movements with their strident demands for accountability through the use of national tests.

America 2000 and the New American Achievement Tests

Since the advent of "The Nation at Risk" report in 1983, there have been at least 57 national and organizational reports (Jackson, 1991) that followed. The majority of these reports have focused on accountability issues and schooling. To illustrate the focus on accountability, we turn to one of the newer and more publicized reports, America 2000 (Alexander and Bush, 1991). While there are many contradictions in America 2000, its strong belief in the power of accountability monitored through tests is unwavering. In fact, it can be argued that accountability is the central concept in the document (the word "accountability" itself occurs 23 times, which is approximately

once per page), and that the new American Achievement Tests are the major vehicle by which this accountability is to be attained. The evidence for this contention can be found throughout the Plan's various components: America 2000 calls for parents to have the option of sending their children to schools of their choice, and the way they will make this choice is to compare schools' test scores; America's students are to become competitive with students from other nations, and the way we will know that our students have achieved this "world class status" is to examine the test results from their schools; communities throughout the nation are to develop "report cards" on their schools, and the basic component of the grades for these report cards are the test results. These examples can be found on many of the pages of the document.

Since the new achievement tests are so central to America 2000, we think it is important to view them from a critical perspective and not to fall once again into the trap of accepting standardized tests as the ultimate measure of educational attainment. Haladyna, Nolen and Haas (1991) and other researchers, have indicated the surprising lack of criticism of tests of this kind:

> The coin of the realm in public education in the United States is the standardized achievement test score. This score is universally and uncritically accepted by the public and many educators as a valid measure of educational accomplishment....

We have examined the major arguments for and against these tests in other publications (Sewell, Shapiro and DuCette, 1991;

Shapiro, DuCette and Sewell, 1992). Our two major concerns about the new tests can be summarized as follows: (1) No matter how valid or compelling the theoretical arguments seem to be for the tests, in practice they will not produce genuine accountability, nor will they improve real achievement or student learning in the schools; (2) The implementation of these tests will have a severe negative impact on those in our society who are already not well served by our educational system: minorities, the disabled, the poor, and all others who do not fit the white, middle class norms which seem to have informed America 2000.

Whatever else might be said about the New American Achievement Tests, which are so central to America 2000, one of the unquestionable outcomes of these tests will be, what we can only call, a national curriculum in the five areas to be tested (English, mathematics, science, history and geography). Proponents of the tests, including Secretary Alexander, have argued that the tests will not be mandatory, will be able to reflect regional variations, and will not lead to a national curriculum. In America 2000, this issue is specifically raised by an unknown hypothetical questioner:

> Q. Do national tests mean a national curriculum?
>
> A. No- although surveys and polls indicate that most Americans have no objection to the idea of a national curriculum. The American Achievement Tests will examine the results of education. They have nothing to say about how these results are produced, what teachers do in class from one day to the next, what instructional materials are chosen, what lesson plans are followed. They should result in less regulation of the means of education- because they focus exclusively on the ends. (p. 32)

As we have argued in our previous publications, none of these statements is credible. Anyone who can argue that focusing on the ends of education will have no effect on the means by which these ends are attained is either uninformed or naive. In fact, national standardized achievement tests will lead to a national curriculum, and a national curriculum will lead to more homogeneity in our schools.

There is also the implied argument in America 2000 that the use of the New American Achievement Tests, because they are objective, will have a positive effect in increasing the equality of educational opportunity in America. This is a seductive argument which has been put forward on several other occasions to justify the use of tests. According to this argument, testing has the salutary value of improving the opportunities of low income and minority children. Put another way, the use of tests, in theory, allows all students the same opportunity to achieve and do well in school.

Of all the arguments presented for the tests, this one is perhaps the most dangerous. It is our belief that differential socio-economic circumstances make standardized tests inherently biased against poor and/or minority children, and consequently that these tests negatively affect educational opportunities and success. The response to this criticism has usually focused on statistical or methodological principles. This is exactly the position which America 2000 takes, when, in responding to the unknown questioner answers the charge of minority bias by saying:

"As for bias, the new tests will be screened to eliminate it. Bear in mind that minority parents also want to know how well their children-and the schools their children attend-are doing in relation to the national education goals and standards." (p. 32) Our concern, however, is not that the tests will be flawed through poor test construction procedures, but rather that poor test performance is an almost certain outcome of poverty.

It must be remembered that the social reality into which a large percentage of America's children are born is vastly different from the one depicted in America 2000. It is a world in which lives are battered by poverty, social isolation and often racial and ethnic inequities. It is an environment where crime, drug addiction, pollution, abuse and other factors are daily realities. There are urban and rural communities where children attend school physically and psychologically unprepared to learn. There are social conditions in which the nutritional status and health care needs of the children adversely affect academic achievement. It is a grim world far removed from the environment of America's privileged middle and upper class youth for whom America 2000 is intended and to whom it wishes to appeal. The negative impact of standardized tests on the poor and minorities, therefore, is not an issue of flawed test construction; rather, it is an issue of insensitive social policies which have permitted too many of America's youth to be raised in an environment where taking and doing well on a standardized test is often irrelevant and sometimes impossible.

The social issues that impact on many of America's children receive short shrift in America 2000 as does the concept of diversity. Sprinkled throughout the document are a few references to "at risk" children, and a few sections such as the one which indicates that communities should develop schools which meet their own individual needs, "as long as these schools meet the national educational goals" (p. 12). Primarily, however, America 2000 reflects a traditional, white, middle-class view of America. We could demonstrate this point in many ways, but it is perhaps best captured by a comment which occurs in the section titled Communities Where Learning Can Happen: "It's time to end the "no fault" era of heedlessness and neglect, and as we shape tomorrow's schools, to rediscover the timeless values that are necessary for achievement" (p. 21). While these "timeless values" are not explicitly defined, it is difficult to believe that they have anything in common with a multicultural curriculum.

Above all, what is missing in America 2000 is any discussion of the demographics of the 21st Century and the realization that many of our new workers will come from Latino, African-American, and Asian backgrounds in the U.S. of the future. What is also missing is the awareness that women will make up much of the workforce in this new era. The omissions of difference in the report indicate that the "timeless values" of a white, middle-class, male culture will remain in place as the curriculum in the 21st Century schools. The implicit message in America 2000 is

that there is no place for a multicultural curriculum and that the myth of the melting pot will carry on as an underlying concept of the curriculum of U.S. schools. In America 2000, this myth of the melting pot also enables the continued growth of accountability monitored by standardized tests. In this report, cultural or learning differences are ignored, and the underlying assumption is that all children can be taught and assessed in the same way.

Background to Feminist Assessment

Throughout this paper, we have indicated that we believe there is a dilemma emanating from an attempt to combine diversity with accountability. In this section, we will focus on what we think may be one solution for the dilemma confronting school administrators in attempting to combine the two current trends. This solution arises out of the experiences of the National Assessment Team (NATs), a group of six assessment experts, in developing an evaluative plan for a national investigation of Women's Studies Programs. This FIPSE funded investigation, termed "The Courage to Question," evaluated seven Women's Studies Programs over a three year period of time. Our choice of this assessment model is based on our belief that Women's Studies programs have dealt with precisely the dilemma of accountability and diversity throughout their history that public education is now facing and that they have developed a workable solution to the problem. As a non-traditional academic area in postsecondary education attempting to develop credibility, the directors and

faculty of Women's Studies programs knew that they would need to meet traditional criteria for acceptability. In addition, however, these programs have been based on the central concept of diversity. They tend to emphasize not only gender issues, but ethnicity, social class and other areas of difference. These programs also are based on the assumption that there are legitimate alternative ways of acquiring knowledge and assessing what has been learned.

From their inception, therefore, Women's Studies Programs had to find ways to meet the conflicting demands of accountability and diversity. Out of this need came a new form of assessment. As detailed by Shapiro (1993), feminist assessment:

(1) questions almost everything related to assessment;

(2) is student centered;

(3) is participatory;

(4) is deeply affected by its context or institutional culture;

(5) is decentered;

(6) is connected to its activist beliefs;

(7) should be compatible with it beliefs;

(8) is connected to the power of its pedagogy;

(9) is connected to its interdisciplinary scholarship and research approaches.

While some of the nine guiding principles may need to be modified to apply directly to public education, the experiences

derived from the assessment of the Women's Studies programs should be useful for educational administrators who are faced with the dilemmas we have outlined in this paper. At the very least, we believe that these principles establish a framework within which the issues can be discussed in the broader context of the national debate on educational reform.

Overview of "The Courage to Question"

Briefly, let us look at "The Courage to Question". Then let us turn to the guiding principles of feminist assessment in a little more detail and indicate how each of them might be implemented in schools.

The central focus of "The Courage to Question" was to investigate exactly what and how students were learning in women's studies classes at the postsecondary level. A parallel narrative that emerged simultaneously involved the process which faculty and students eventually adopted for gathering information about student learning in their programs. It was a story that members of the National Assessment Team (NATs) and the project director began to record from the very first time they met as a group in the fall of 1989. While there was no question that the primary function of the National Assessment Team was to train women's studies directors from seven campuses in assessment theories, strategies, and methods, their ancillary function was to formulate some broad-based principles about feminist assessment growing from the evaluative process itself on the different campuses. These diverse campuses included: City

University of New York - Hunter College; Lewis and Clark College; Oberlin College; Old Dominion University; University of Colorado; University of Missouri-Columbia; and Wellesley College.

In an early session, the NATs determined that there would be different forms of assessment on each site rather than a standard form of measurement. The project director, the women's studies and the gender studies program directors concurred. They and the NATs judged that the context would drive the assessment criteria. They all felt that, if provided with a wealth of diverse assessment approaches, women's studies faculty and students would select the methods appropriate for their particular site. It was also thought that given the common knowledge base of feminist scholarship, feminist pedagogy, and feminist research methodology, that there would be enough similarities discovered in the assessment process and products without the need for a standard instrument.

In the area of assessment itself, workshops were held by the NATs that presented a range of diverse forms of assessment. The measures and techniques introduced included:

-- institutional profile data
-- historical document analysis
-- student evaluation of courses
-- surveys (structured and unstructured)
-- portfolios
-- individual interviews and/or group ones (collective conversations)

-- journals, individual and/or group (a dialogic journal)

-- self-assessment

-- performance assessment

-- feminist classroom observations (sometimes compared with regular classroom observations)

-- course syllabi analysis

For the purposes of validity, different forms of triangulation were used to assess this project. According to Merriam (1988), triangulation means "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings." Multiple measures for assessment were deemed important to provide one form of triangulation. Program directors, their faculty, and students chose from the array of approaches and techniques the kinds of assessment appropriate for their sites. Their choices were very much guided by the resources available to them on a given campus--extra help to carry out the assessment process, released time provided or not provided, administrative support for women's studies, and the political realities of a site.

Another form of triangulation used in this investigation focused on multiple perspectives, and it therefore became important to hear diverse voices. Participants on a given site took into account as many of the voices--of students, of faculty, of administrators and of alumnae/i--that were applicable for their context. While the focus was on what students learned in women's studies or gender studies classrooms, varied perspectives

for understanding the learning environment were deemed essential.

Guiding Principles of Feminist Assessment

The guiding principles of feminist assessment that emerged by the completion of this three-year program are outgrowths of what was learned from the perspectives of the NATs, the project director, and the participating programs. These principles emerged from the accumulated data and observations emanating from the diverse women's studies and gender studies programs. These nine principles are meant to be a provisionary guide to conducting feminist assessment, and they summarize major ideas on this new area of assessment thus far.

It is important to note that in defining the following guiding principles, the terms "assessment" and "evaluation" are often used interchangeably. This is because the approaches to evaluation that are most compatible with feminist pedagogy and assessment are frequently those that are non-traditional and involve an emphasis on the process rather than the product. These approaches tend to focus on the improvement of instruction and the development of a positive learning environment, on a particular site, rather than stress cross-site comparisons for accountability purposes. They also tend to recognize not only the voice of an evaluator, but they value and even privilege the voices of others, such as participants and program directors, who have been a part of the process.

Principles to Deal with the Dilemma of Accountability and Diversity

--Principle #1: Feminist assessment questions almost everything related to assessment. As the title of the project, "The Courage to Question," suggests, feminist assessment questions almost everything that is related to evaluation. Feminist assessment is open to questioning all paradigms, traditions, approaches, instruments, and anything else about how assessment has ever been previously carried out. It raises questions about methodology, purposes, power, use, politics, and the social context. It may ultimately find that the answers to its questions will ally feminist assessment with other "schools" or paradigms for assessment. However, it begins by assuming that what has been done before probably is inadequate--and often inadequate because it has not posed enough questions to see power relations, to note who is missing from the discussion, to appreciate the importance of context, and to understand the need to cross paradigms or to recognize shifting paradigms for purposes of assessment.

In an era of accountability, for school administrators and teachers the questioning approach towards assessment should be seriously considered. For too long, schools have been faced with the ordeal of proving that diverse students are learning by using limited assessment approaches often controlled by outside evaluators and usually centered around standardized test scores. Certainly, the time has come for school administrators to question the restricted ways of assessing learning and to make

their criticisms known.

-- **Principle #2: Feminist assessment is student centered.** Feminist assessment, when tied to student learning, is dependent on students for information about what they are learning. This approach is in marked contrast to other methods traditionally used in assessment. For example, as we have discussed, America 2000 relies on the creation of national tests in which students must perform to meet someone else's preconceived determination of what is valuable. By contrast, feminist assessment turns to the students to reveal what is important to them, what they want to learn, and where their needs are not being met. In feminist assessment, student involvement in evaluating their own learning is a guiding principle. Students may serve as the key source of information; as participants in the research process itself; and--in some cases--as co-assessors with faculty.

Feminist assessment recognizes there is no single student who can possibly stand for the whole. In keeping with its theoretical suspicion of aggregates and universals that have too often obscured the distinctiveness of the individual learner; it also looks for possible and more informative patterns emerging from smaller disaggregate groupings. Since the standpoint from which each of us views the world leads inevitably toward partial perspectives, feminist assessment gains its power from holding on as much as possible to the insights of those partial perspectives, forming in the process a more textured and accurate collective whole.

From the school administrator's perspective, this form of assessment takes into account individual and group differences. It places students at the center of the learning process. Hopefully, this form of assessment would be more appropriate for the students and appear to be much more credible than traditional assessment in the eyes of the classroom teachers as well.

-- **Principle #3: Feminist assessment is participatory.** Grounded in feminist theory which seeks to understand oppressive silencing and in feminist pedagogy which seeks to give students voice, feminist assessment is deeply committed to an interactive strategy that generates a rich conversation. Less like an external process imposed by detached and distanced experts, feminist assessment resembles more a group of people gathered together to create meaning. As such, it opens up the process rather than narrowing its options and opinions. Those involved in the project (consultants, project personnel, researchers, students) form different configurations throughout the study and their roles continue to be in flux. For example, in "The Courage to Question", consultants often changed roles and became learners during joint planning sessions or in their visits to the various sites; and students frequently became the assessors of their own learning process. In these ways, traditional hierarchical patterns and power relationships are challenged.

Such participatory evaluation emphasizes that those who will be assessed should be part of a continuing dialogue related to the evaluative process. Each participant is encouraged to have a

voice in the evaluative process. Participatory evaluation (Shapiro, 1988), an off-shoot of illuminative evaluation (Parlett and Dearden, 1977; Shapiro and Reed, 1984; Shapiro and Reed, 1988) combines both qualitative and quantitative evaluative methods and was designed specifically with women's studies and non-traditional programs in mind. Nevertheless, both illuminative evaluation and participatory evaluation are possible approaches for assessing student learning in traditional programs as well.

Turning to schools, it would seem that this participatory approach would be very compatible with some of the current educational reforms. For example, this approach should combine well with site-based management and participatory decision-making. It turns assessment over to those who work and learn at a particular site. It is extremely decentralized and it asks students, teachers, staff and administrators to all play a part in the assessment process. Throughout an evaluation, representatives or volunteers from all parts of the organization would be expected to play an active role in the selection of questions for the study, evaluative techniques, collection and analysis of data, as well as in writing the final report.

-- **Principle #4: Feminist assessment is deeply affected by its context or institutional culture.** While much traditional research decontextualizes its inquiries and findings, feminist assessment is informed continually by context. It therefore avoids abstractions that are not understood to be firmly rooted in a

specific time, place, or history. For women's studies or gender studies programs, the context or institutional culture is important and cannot be ignored, particularly when the delicate area of assessing student learning is what is being measured. On certain campuses, the women's studies or gender studies program is an integral part of the institution, while on others it may be more marginal. On some sites, feminism may be seen as subversive and dangerous, and on another it may be considered to be a cutting edge area. It is clear that the kind of assessment that can be carried out on a particular site is affected by the political realities of the institution--and our political realities of the culture at large. In short, <u>the politics of assessment</u> looms large in this area of feminist assessment.

Additionally, the contextual reality of an urban, suburban, or rural environment can create a very different program. For example, an urban institution might have a very diverse student population, while a rural institution might be homogeneous in its student composition. Further, geographical locations can lead to the development of unique programs. In the U.S., a southwestern program may emphasize Native Americans, while a northeastern program may focus on the study of Latinos and African-Americans. Hence, a site specific assessment process becomes important to measure student learning in different contexts or institutional cultures.

For school administrators, feminist assessment provides a strong argument for the importance of the context or school

culture. As such, it enables the diverse composition of a student population to be seriously taken into account in any kind of evaluation. Additionally, it should prevent gross generalizations, based on the results of standardized tests, from being accepted as the sole means to evaluate student learning.

-- **Principle #5: Feminist assessment is decentered.** Feminist assessment begins to deconstruct the usual "outside in" or stringent vertical hierarchy to create a more open, varied, and web-like structure. It avoids an "outsider" or more dominant, powerful, and seemingly objective force from determining what questions should be asked and how they should be framed. It also avoids an attempt to meet some abstract notion of excellence that has no roots or connections to the group, program, and/or curriculum being evaluated.

This concept of assessment moves more from the "inside out" rather than from the "outside in." In "The Courage to Question", while a structure was built into the assessment process, the structure provided for different loci of power. A "neutral" outside assessor was not envisioned. Instead, many knowledgeable inside assessors (NATs, Project Director, Program Directors, faculty, students) were utilized who were conversant with the pedagogy, methodology and scholarship under review and who were active in the design and development of the assessment process.

For school administrators, a strong case can be made for external evaluators who really know and care about children and their education. By selecting such evaluators, the guise of

impartiality is removed and other knowledgeable and concerned individuals (school administrators, teachers, counselors, students and parents) can legitimately play a part in the assessment process.

-- **Principle #6: Feminist assessment approaches should be compatible with activist beliefs.** Feminist assessment is driven by its immediate connection to the implications of its research. That is, feminist assessment expects its thinking, its data gathering, and its analysis to have a relationship to actions we will take. Not an abstraction floating without any ties to the concrete, feminist assessment is action-oriented and encourages social change to be achieved as an outcome of the process.

In "The Courage to Question", diverse sites stressed the feminist activist principles of collaboration and collectivity. This emphasis could be seen in retreats and collective conversations when initial ideas were formulated and assessment strategies were planned. Also, in keeping with feminist activism, the voices of the many, as opposed to the preaching of the few, are legitimated in feminist assessment. Collaboration and collectivity consider the whole--the whole learner, the whole community, the whole program--as they look to many sources for a more complete picture of what is being assessed or evaluated.

In "The Courage to Question", the feminist belief in the concept of creating ways to give voice to those who might otherwise not be heard was also demonstrated by the heavy emphasis on interviews, both individual and group; classroom

teacher/student verbal interactions; individual and dialogic journals; and performance assessment.

Not only feminist activists, but public school administrators and teachers have been challenged by emancipatory theorists (Fraser, 1989; Giroux, 1992; Greene, 1988) to reclaim democratic processes; to help the oppressed find their voice; and to work together collectively for the common good. For those school administrators who have high regard for community involvement and have asked their teachers to become activists on behalf of their students, this principle will have special meaning.

-- **Principle #7: Feminist assessment is heavily shaped by the power of its pedagogy.** Feminist pedagogy is rooted in and informed by relationships. In fact, a core contribution of feminist thought is the recognition of the role of relationships in learning, in human development, and in moral reasoning. Not surprisingly, the concept of relationship is at the heart of the kinds of questions feminist assessment poses and the methods it chooses to use to gather data.

Learner outcomes cannot be separated from teacher pedagogy. Therefore, assessment instruments relying on relationships, on dialogue, and on conversation are often the overwhelming instruments of choice. It logically gravitates towards aural/voice assessment techniques, which value listening over looking, connection over separation, and thinking together over counting responses. This might take the form of more loosely

structured focus groups, classroom observations, post-observation interviews, telephone inquiries, and open-ended surveys. Therefore, observations of feminist classrooms become central to assessment. So, too, are post-observational interviews and open-ended surveys as they ask those actually involved in the learning process to self-assess, in some detail.

Additionally, individual journal writing, group or dialogic journal entries and portfolios become important not only from a pedagogical perspective, but from an evaluative one. Along with feminist pedagogy, emancipatory pedagogy is frequently employed in women's studies classrooms. Both pedagogical approaches encourage all students to speak their minds in writing assignments and in class discussions. Such openness can be of use in the area of evaluation. It logically follows that students from different backgrounds be asked to reflect more broadly on the learning process itself. This kind of data, generated through student participation, can lead to the development of questions (and some answers) that one can ask about how learning should be assessed. Feminist assessment then also should take into account the scholarship that has been written from a feminist pedagogical (Sadker and Sadker, 1982) as well as from an emancipatory pedagogical perspective (Culley and Portugues, 1985; Gabriel and Smithson, 1990; Maher and Schniedewind, 1987).

Currently, feminists are not alone in trying to combine pedagogy with suitable forms of assessment. School

administrators would do well to ask faculty to meet frequently to discuss their own pedagogy in order to get a sense of commonalities and differences in approach. Once openly addressed, the discussion of pedagogy can lead to dialogue on meaningful and diverse forms of assessment compatible with teaching.

-- **Principle #8: Feminist assessment is based on a body of feminist scholarship and feminist research methodology that is central to this interdisciplinary area.** To be successful, feminist assessment must be compatible with feminist scholarship. It should take into consideration such concepts as maternal thinking (Ruddick, 1989), caring (Noddings, 1984), concern and relatedness (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Ward and Taylor, 1988; Gilligan, Lyons and Hammer, 1990) and women's ways of knowing or connected learning (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986). These concepts can serve as the theoretical framework for feminist evaluation, a process more concerned with improvement than testing, with nurtured progression than with final judgments.

Much of feminist methodology, like feminist scholarship, finds dichotomous thinking inaccurate and therefore seeks to break down the sometimes, if not usually, artificial barriers between what are frequently presented as irreconcilable opposites. For feminist methodology (Bowles and Duelli-Klein, 1983; Daly, 1973; Harding and Hintikka, 1983; Lather, 1991; Stanley and Wise, 1983), crossing paradigms and traditions do not

seem to be insurmountable obstacles. Therefore, the forms of assessment used should be the natural outgrowth of scholarship in the field, and an emphasis on joining theory and praxis should be compatible with that body of theoretical and applied knowledge.

Needless to say, for public school administrators and teachers there is a need to make theory and praxis more compatible. A large body of scholarship and methodology is available in the field of education. It is up to school administrators and teachers to determine their educational philosophy; choose appropriate scholarship for their philosophy to provide a theoretical framework for praxis; and utilize complementary methods of assessment.

-- **Principle #9: Feminist assessment appreciates values.** Feminist assessment begins with and enacts values. It does not presume to be objective in the narrow sense of the word nor does feminist theory believe there is any such thing as a value-free "scientific" investigation. Even the title of the project, "The Courage to Question," flaunts its ideological preference for and commitment to questioning. Similarly, the kinds of questions posed at the seven campuses reveal their range of values from heightening an awareness of diversity, to empowering students, to instilling a sense of social responsibility.

Women's studies and gender studies students are encouraged to define their own values, to understand the relations of values to learning, and to analyze how values inform perspectives. In keeping with the dynamics of the feminist classroom where such

values are explored, debated, and woven in as one of the educational goals of the women's studies class itself, feminist assessment appreciates values.

Of late, in educational leadership, there has been a growing number of courses in ethics and values. The growth of courses is in response to the perceived need for discussions of values within schools and within society. Bringing values into the assessment process is also very important. It is especially vital when students from diverse cultural backgrounds, often with their own set of values, meet in the classroom. Talking about ethics and values with teachers and students may be a first step in finding commonalities. Those commonalities can assist with assessment and can enable educators to go beyond seemingly value-neutral assessment to develop the kinds of assessment compatible with the values of the culture of the school.

Feminist Assessment as a Solution to Accountability and Diversity

Feminist assessment is not meant to be the only solution to the dilemma we have posed, in this paper, between accountability and diversity. However, it is one way to think through and attempt to resolve the current contradiction. In addition, we think that many of the nine feminist assessment principles are applicable for schools that are just beginning to recenter their curriculum taking into account cultural pluralism, as they respond to the increasing demographic diversity in the United States and the increasing consciousness of the global village we all share. In our centeredness on students, with all their

instructive differences in race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual diversity, age, and disabilities, this participatory assessment process opens up the possibility for new conversations, new insights and new improvements in student learning. It may assist in making learning, teaching and assessment more compatible. It may also raise discussion of issues related to values. Perhaps the feminist approach to evaluation will also expand the options available in the assessment movement as a whole. If nothing else, the approach can be used to continue to broaden the discussion of assessment related to public school accountability and diversity.

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